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Research Institute on Anomalous Phenomena (RIAP) is an independent scientific research body, established in 1992 by the Kharkov-based aerospace company *Vertical* and aimed at scientific studies in the fields of non-traditional energy sources, the problem of anomalous atmospheric phenomena and the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) question.

We study: anomalous phenomena.
We consider: any theories.
We accept: normal proofs, exact references.

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EDITORIAL

TRYING TO LEARN THE LESSONS OF HISTORY...

Both this and the next RB issues are oriented to the history of ufology. We are publishing an extensive survey by Mikhail Gershtein dealing with observations of anomalous atmospheric phenomena in the territory of Russia from ancient times up until the 19th century, memoirs of Yuriy Fomin, the first Soviet ufologist, as well as a very interesting response by Chris Aubeck to Dr. Yuriy Morozov's article about the "Russian Roswell" (RB Vol. 6, No. 4).

All these things are certainly interesting in themselves. The history of ufology is already being formed as a separate scientific research field (cf., for example: Tulien T. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Sign Historical Group UFO History Workshop*. Scotland, CT, 1999). It is of importance both from the viewpoint of pure factuality, so to speak (many details of how the science top brass and governments of leading powers viewed the UFO phenomenon are still "behind the curtain"), and for specialists in epistemology—at least for those who understand that the process of cognition is not limited by its scientific form, and that some essential features of it may be better seen in "borderland" examples. But the main thing is not even this. The history of ufology is for contemporary ufological studies far more important than, let's say, the history of genetics for contemporary genetic studies. The point is that genetics is a normal scientific discipline, possessing its own well-established theoretical models and a set of reliable empirical data, as well as effective research methodologies and procedures. Even though it would not be totally useless for a geneticist to know some of the history of the science, he or she may, generally speaking, take the liberty of not becoming too deeply absorbed in it. There exists a certain paradigm, inside which the geneticist may work and obtain scientifically meaningful results.

As for ufology, it is definitely far from such a mature state. In fact, it simply does not exist as a *scientific* field of research. One of its main defects is the lack of cumulativeness—the feature so natural for "normal" scientific fields of research.

One can disagree: the set of UFO reports (together with reports about "contacts" and "abductions") is constantly growing; if this is not a cumulative effect, what is it? ...The lack of any "final solution" does not prove anything either: the problem itself is just too difficult and the resources allocated for this work are utterly inadequate to its real scope.

Yes, this data set does grow rather swiftly. But the ratio of "anecdotal evidence" ("stories") relative to objective data, as well as the ratio of "ufological entertainment" relative to ufological studies, grows even more quickly. And the proportion of reliable information in this set swiftly tends to zero.

Almost the only "relatively proved" fact about which the *specialists*-ufologists (CSICOP dabblers may be here excluded from consideration) agree is as follows: there exists the UFO phenomenon in the strict sense of the word, that is objects and phenomena whose nature and origin defy any explanation in terms of existing scientific conceptions. Outside this small area of concordance, we can see nothing but divergences in opinions.

Another side of "ufological non-cumulativeness" is that potentially important works of various authors (especially those not written in the English language) are swiftly forgotten and withdrawn from active use by the ufological community. This is a trait typical more of the mass media than of science.

As distinct from its Western counterpart, Soviet ufology originated—and for a long time existed—as a "pure" field of research and cognitive interest; there was in fact virtually no "entertainment". But since the collapse of totalitarism it has very quickly rushed into the arms of the yellow press, although not totally. In general, at least in this area, we have at last overtaken and surpassed the West. ("To overtake and surpass" was a very popular official slogan in Soviet times.) Nevertheless, there still exist in Russia, Ukraine, and other countries of the Community of Independent States some relics of their ufological past which are not so typical of Western ufology (say, somewhat better tolerance of UFO studies by SETI specialists). This is why, among other things, the history of Soviet ufology provides important and interesting material for theoretico-methodological analysis.

Of course, standards of science do not function in an "automated" mode: they are interpreted and applied by human beings. And we poor humans are so prone not to see the beam in our own eyes...

Here is an illustration. On October 3–7, 2001, there was held in Moscow a symposium "Profanation of Reason: Expansion of Charlatanism and Paranormal Beliefs into Russian Culture of the Beginning of 21st Century". It was organized jointly by CSICOP and the Commission for the Struggle Against Pseudoscience and Falsification of Results of Scientific Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (together with the Philosophical Department of Moscow State University and the Russian Humanistic Society). We have already considered the activities of the Commis-

sion on Pseudoscience (see RB Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 2–3); unfortunately, participation in this symposium only confirmed our main conclusion: the attitude of the Russian academic elite to "pseudoscience" is a mixture of fear and incomprehension.

Their American colleagues displayed mainly the latter feeling. By the way, Professor Paul Kurtz, when speaking at the symposium, drew a definite parallel between the aims and activities of CSICOP and those of the Commission on Pseudoscience. A very significant confession, one must agree. Again and again, the organizers of the symposium repeated like an incantation the same absurd thesis—"extraordinary claims need extraordinary proofs"—which probably seems to them a piece of extraordinary wisdom and the quintessence of the principles of science... Yes, it sounds good and even poetical... but it has actually nothing to do with science at all. A simple counter-example: can you find a more extraordinary claim than, say, the idea that the electron is *both* a particle and a wave? And nonetheless, it may be proved with the help of quite "ordinary"—even not too sophisticated—physical experiments. It is therefore quite evident that any scientific claim, however unusual, needs for its acceptance nothing but a normal scientific proof. Otherwise, science could not exist at all.

The criteria according to which a claim is accepted or rejected by science cannot vary with the contents of the claim, still less with its supposed "level of extraordinariness". If the "rules of the game" are changed at will, depending on whether or not the "judges" like the claims under consideration, the result of the "trial" may be easily predicted. And this situation can be interpreted in only one way: inside contemporary big science there has arisen a sort of pseudoscientific inquisition based on the axiom of its own infallibility and completely forgetting about any self-tests.

A ufologist may consider the current state of world ufology to be even worse than does a CSICOP member (or a member of the Commission on Pseudoscience)—but he at least knows from his *own* ufological research experience that the UFO phenomenon is real and no fantasy. It can't be helped if a self-styled scientific inquisitor remains unaware of this fact or prefers to ignore it. After all, a specialist in cosmology will hardly seriously argue with, say, a philologist who, due to some strange reason, "dislikes" cosmological studies. As the saying goes, ignorance is not a justification.

...It would probably be somewhat premature to state that we are already able to conclude from the works published in RB by now, where ufology went wrong on its historical path. But hopefully, these works could provide some food for the mind. The bent of contemporary ufology for entertainment or even for social psychology, being understandable, remains nevertheless definitely blameworthy. If there is "at the center" of the UFO phenomenon something "tangible", then at the center of UFO studies there must be search for and investigation of this objective component.

What is needed for this? First of all, ufology requires its own paradigm—a model for posing and solving its research tasks shared by the whole ufological community (or at least, by its scientifically-oriented part). It has remained for too long in a "pre-paradigmal" state. Of course, at this stage of investigations we do not need the "only correct" model of the phenomenon—but we need an *effective approach* to its study. Perhaps, investigating the abductees could be effective in this sense: that is, the investigators could have found, say, genetically altered DNA as a result of alien intervention in human organisms. But up to now we have nothing of this sort. "Stories" in themselves cannot be an empirical basis for scientific research—even though they may "give a push" to such research.

...Yet, perhaps somewhat inconsistently, I should confess that we at RIAP do not consider the "stories" as quite useless. And even more inconsistently, we open in this RB issue a new section—*Testimonies*—intending to publish in it "pure stories"—though lacking objective corroborations, but internally consistent, informative, and strange enough to interest anomalists. In this RB issue we are publishing a letter written by Yuriy Agarkov, a resident of the Russian city Nizhniy Tagil, who describes a highly unusual incident that happened to him 43 years ago in the steppes of Kazakhstan; in the next RB issue a report will be published by Valeriy Kukushkin, a well-known Russian anomalist, about a visit of a strange being to his apartment.

Can these stories be of any help and value to ufology and anomalistics in general? I think yes. We can hope to find in them some significant parallels to other similar stories ("meaningful regularities", so to speak), as well as an occasion to stimulate the "potential of innovations" inside our research community. True science advances by combining the freedom of imagination with the discipline of logical thinking in a sort of dialectical unity. To suggest the "impossible" postulates of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity was, probably, even more difficult than to logically develop them further into the well-balanced theories confirmed by experiments. But the main thing is that these postulates make such a development possible. Some alternative conceptions in physics of this day and age are, alas, lacking just this essential trait. Perhaps we ufologists do also happen to lack in our theoretical considerations not only "good logic", but first of all "good imagination".

— Vladimir V. Rubtsov

A THOUSAND YEARS OF RUSSIAN UFOs (Part I)

Mikhail B. Gershtein

1. Introduction

These notes about UFO sightings in the territory of Russia and the former Russian Empire do not aspire to a comprehensive character. It is very difficult to write about something that never was a subject for serious historical investigation, that was never arranged in chronological order, and neither even in any way systemized. Preceding works, to some extent dealt with this subject, either casting a light on a very small fragment of the whole picture (one or a few UFO observations [1-3]), or at best touching a separate "wave" of UFO sightings, sharply limited in time [4; 5], or were unsystematic agglomerations of facts mostly having nothing to do with true UFOs (see, for example, Refs. 6 and 7). Besides, many reports about UFO sightings prior to the year 1917 still remain dispersed in archives, old newspapers and journals, being therefore inaccessible to researchers; and those already published have more often than not been distorted to add to them a more sensational character. Thus, in one newspaper item [8] one can read:

"In a May issue of the newspaper *Zabaykalskiye Vedomosti* (Transbaikalian Gazette), at the peak of the infamous war between Russia and Japan of 1905, there was published an interesting piece of information: 'Japanese balloons give no peace to the inhabitants of Siberian cities: they were observed in Chita and on May 9, at one o'clock, at Verkhneudinsk. At that time the local inhabitants thought that unidentified flying objects were Japanese balloons.'"

In actual fact, the original text in *Zabaykalskiye **Oblastniye** Vedomosti* (Transbaikalian *Regional* Gazette) is as follows:

"Japanese balloons give no peace to the inhabitants of Siberian cities: some of them were observed in Chita and, later, at Verkhneudinsk. On May 9, at one o'clock, a joker deemed it necessary to launch over the city a cluster of the gutta-percha bubbles that children are so fond of playing with. Credulous inhabitants of Verkhneudinsk instantly twigged that it was a Japanese balloon, and seeing some soldiers passing by with their rifles they decided: "The soldiers are going to shoot at the Japanese balloon"... Oh, sancta simplicitas!" [9]

Some reports of this sort have been written down only in recent times from the verbal statements of elderly witnesses or their relatives—more often than not being distorted in the process of information transmission and its recording.

Nonetheless, the task I am setting in this paper is not at all hopeless. To facilitate the examination of the material I propose to divide the "ufological prehistory" of Russia and the former Russian Empire into three periods:

– Annalistic period (900 AD—1700 AD)—when reports about UFOs and other unusual sky phenomena ("heavenly signs") were recorded only in historical annals and chronicles, being interpreted at best as good or ill omens of future events.

– Naturalistic period (1701—1891)—when such phenomena were interpreted almost exclusively in terms of natural science. Even though during this period some chroniclers were still describing in their annals "heavenly omens", the reading public was not impressed by these interpretations any longer.

– Aeronautical period (1892—1917)—when strange objects in the sky would be considered as due to the engineering activities of humans ("Germans", "Englishmen", or "mysterious inventors") or aliens ("Martians").

2. Annalistic Period

2.1. Early Centuries

The main characteristic feature of UFO reports dating from the annalistic period is their brevity—which in most cases prevents identification of the observed phenomena. Any present-day ufological research group would have placed such accounts into a separate folder labeled "Information Insufficient".

Here is the very first "supposedly ufological" report discovered in the Russian historical chronicles by Dr. Vadim Vilinbakhov [10]: in the year 911 A.D. "...there came a great omen in the west in the shape of a spear" [11, p. 184].

Well, this "spear" could probably have been a cigar-shaped "mothership"... But wouldn't it be much simpler to suppose that the fearsome "spear" was in fact just a horizontal layer of small ice crystals illuminated from below by the setting sun, or even the sun's disk elevated from below the horizon and distorted beyond recognition by the effect of anomalous refraction? (It seems to be significant that, according to the chronicler's words, the phenomenon was seen "in the west".) Such phenomena were more than once observed in the nineteenth century and later, not producing any special agitation. But without additional information it does not seem possible to come to a definite conclusion about this case.

Many anomalous reports from the annalistic period can be nevertheless explained rather easily. Thus, in the year 1028 "a sign appeared in the sky, observable all over the earth" [12]. Since this "sign" could be seen over a vast territory, it is reasonable to assume that it was just a kind

of aurora borealis. Some other researchers are of the same opinion (see, for example, [13, p. 243]).

The Tale of Bygone Years reads: in 1066 "...there was an omen in the west, a star very big with blood-red rays, rising at evening on sunset, and this star disappeared seven days later" [14, p. 380]. In spite of the fact that it was positively an observation of Halley's comet (which on March 27, 1066, reached the point nearest to the Earth), the case found a place in the list of "UFO observations in Ancient Rus" by Dr. Vadim Vilinbakhov.

In 1088 "[Prince] Vsevolod was hunting near Vyshegorod, and there cried out and fell a great serpent from the sky, and people were horrified" [15, p. 27]. Most probably, this was a bright bolide leaving behind a serpentine trace in the sky. Here is another account, which states that in 1204 "...there was a great omen: three suns in the eastern sky, and a fourth sun in the west, and in the middle of the sky—a kind of moon like an arc. The omen remained from morning till noon." [16, p. 60] This was nothing but a complex halo (also known as "sun-dogs", or mock suns).

After the identified and "presumably identified" phenomena have been filtered out, the number of remaining reports is not too great. But they are definitely worthy of attention. As the "first Russian UFO" may be considered the enigmatic phenomenon observed in May 922 over the state of Volga Bulgaria that flourished at the period between the first and second millennia on the Itil (Volga) river. Later on, Volga Bulgaria became a part of Russia, but even before then many Russians lived there—envoys, merchants, and just guests.

It was in July of 921 that a mission left Baghdad for Volga Bulgaria with the aim of persuading its king (*khan*) Almush to form a military alliance against Khazar Kaganate. The learned secretary of the mission was Ahmad ibn-Fadlan ibn-al-Abbas ibn-Rashid ibn-Hammad.

This is what ibn-Fadlan and his fellow-travellers saw on May 11, 922:

"In the first night that we spent in his [that is, Almush's] country, I saw that before the final disappearance of sunlight, at a usual hour of prayer, the sky horizon reddened considerably. And I heard in the air loud sounds and a strong hubbub. Then I lifted up my head and lo! a cloud [was seen] not far from me, red like fire, and this hubbub and these sounds came from it. And lo! [there were] in it something like men and horses, and in the hands of some figures inside it, similar to men, [there were] bows, arrows, spears, and naked swords. And they seemed to me sometimes absolutely clear, sometimes just apparent. And lo! [there appeared] near them another similar armed group, a black one, in which I also saw men, horses, and weaponry. And this detachment began to attack the other one, as a cavalry troop attacks another cavalry troop. It was for a long time that we watched one detachment attacking another detachment. They mixed together for some time, then split up, and the phenomenon lasted in such a way for a certain part of the night, after which it disappeared from our sight. We asked the king about the scene and he informed us that his grandfathers used to say that these riders had belonged to the faithful and faithless jinns. They are fighting every evening, and it is true that for the whole time that they existed there was not a single night when they would be absent from this battle. And we have always seen this in the same way." [17, p. 134–135; 18, p. 86–104]

Ambassador Susan ar-Rassi, the head of the mission, dated this phenomenon Muharram 12, 310 (according to the Muslim calendar), that is May 12, 922. He confirmed that on the background of the reddened horizon, an hour before sunset (!), there appeared two strange "clouds", red like fire. There was coming from them noise and voices from the riders inside. Then a combat of the "clouds" and their occupants took place. The Baghdad ambassador continued:

"We became afraid and began humbly praying to God, and the inhabitants of the country taunted us, being amazed at our behavior. All of us were watching how one cloud rushed to the other one, they now mixed up for some time, and then split up, which lasted until one o'clock in the morning, and then they disappeared. We asked the king about the occurrence and he replied that his forefathers used to say these had been worshippers of devils and their adversaries fighting every evening and never stopping their fight." (Quoted from Ref. 19.)

Some present-day commentators believe that ibn-Fadlan and ar-Rassi observed aurora borealis (see, for example, [20, p. 247; 21, p. 28–29; 22, p. 74).

Such an interpretation is definitely unacceptable: first, the phenomenon started in daylight (!); second, it was May—and for this month aurora borealis is not typical at all, not to mention the latitude of the place of the incident. At southern latitudes aurora borealis may be observed very rarely (the authors of the book [23, p. 66] write in their work that to the south of 45° N it is seen, on average, once in each 11-year cycle of Solar activity). Nevertheless, the Bulgars did not share the superstitious fear of the Arabs and scoffed at their fright. This probably means that they saw such phenomena often enough and were accustomed to them. Third, aurora borealis is accompanied by a soft rustle at best, not by loud sounds or "hubbub". Even if we ascribe the black figures of "riders with swords" to the

lively imagination of the Arabs, the enigma does not diminish.

The Bulgarian historian Bozhidar Dimitrov (living in Sofia—the capital of present-day Bulgaria) assumed that ibn-Fadlan had seen alien spacecraft that performed some regular operations over the Itil—say, refueling (see Ref. 24.) Although such a supposition is appreciably influenced by space era notions, it can hardly be considered as absolutely groundless.

2.2. Anomalous Aerial Phenomena in the 17th Century

In the treatise *On the Fall of Light from the Sky*, written by the Armenian chronicler Zacharia Sarcofag in the 17th century, one can read the following description of the remarkable object that the author saw in 1641:

"In the day of the Exaltation of the Cross,—writes he,—at sunset it was still not dark and the daylight was lasting. Suddenly the ether on the eastern side was torn up and a big dark-blue light began to descend. Being wide and long, it came down approaching the Earth and its ray illuminated everything around more brightly than the Sun. And the forward part of the light revolved like a wheel, moving to the north, calmly and slowly emitting red and white light, and in front of the light, at a distance of an open hand, there was a star the size of Venus. The light was still visible until my father had sung, weeping, six *sharakans*, after which it moved away, and we heard afterwards that people saw this miraculous light up to Akhaltsikhe."

This phenomenon lasted about 15 minutes (*sharakan* is a brief prayer that is sung over a period of two to three minutes).

And here is an excerpt from another manuscript also authored by Zacharia Sarcofag and describing "heavenly signs" of the year 1679:

"One night, everybody saw in the air something similar to a shaft and a spear. Their ends were like that of a lance. They began gradually to turn to the east and to the west. This lasted for 20 days and then [the objects] swiftly vanished. After that there appeared a star, very big, of yellow color, with long and wide hairs that were directed to the west. And this hair shone and fell to the earth, like sparks. The event lasted for a month and two days. [The star] never moved from its place; it was seen sometimes in the evening, sometimes in the morning, and sometimes in the middle of night, but then it disappeared." [25]

The latest important annalistic source of information on UFOs over Russia is the *Chronicles Siberian* by the "book-lover and connoisseur of Holy Scripture" named Cherepanov who lived in the city of Tobolsk. These *Chronicles* were written at the boundary between the annalistic and naturalistic periods. They contain many a report about "aerial signs" that were seen over this city between the years 1656 and 1741. In particular, Cherepanov writes that on November 25, 1696, "...on Sunday, at two post meridiem, there appeared in Tobolsk a sign in the sun: it split into four parts, as it were, and the rays from the sun were light, but in the middle it was dark; and among these parts one could see in the darkness something like a man with extended arms... The same month, November 28, at night, at five o'clock, there was a sign in the east: from a dark cloud there was suspended something like an icon-lamp with a great fire that shone brightly and descended down to the very earth. And soon it burned out." [26]

3. Naturalistic Period

3.1. Star Wars of the 18th Century

Since the inception of the naturalistic period, such phenomena began to obtain scientific "labels" ("lightning", "meteor", etc.) In 1704, when Russian troops besieged the fortress of Narva, the following occurred:

"On the 20th day of July, at 6 post meridiem, [we] heard in the clouds over our transport convoy cracks like those of rockets and lifting up our heads we saw in the sky an extraordinary sign (or a meteor). There was flying in the air, not very high up, an elongated cloud of fiery appearance, as if a bundle of straw left the city of Narva in the direction of the our convoy and having reached it the cloud stopped and stretched out like an arrow, and the forward end of the cloud bent a little behind our convoy and seemed to have crumbled and rather thinned, and a spark fell from that one. And then [it looked] like a small star; and some people saw that from this end emerged three small stars: first, a black one, then a royal-blue one, and then a third red one. The appearance of the whole cloud changed from fiery to yellowish with a touch of white; and some time later that one began to spread upward, but thereafter, not much intensified, that cloud stood still in its place for more than two hours; however, the cloud began to look like a normal one, then it thinned and then everything vanished. There were in the army various opinions concerning the event and various warnings, and many examples were quoted of when such meteors had appeared at other times and places, betokening some extraordinary events; but the [successful] completion of the siege showed that the meteor had not foretold any evil." (Quoted from Ref. 27.)

But the most spectacular and enigmatic phenomenon of the 18th century resembling a sort of "star wars" was observed on April 2, 1716 (Old Style) over the Baltic Sea, near Revel (now Tallinn). Its descriptions have been kept in various official reports and ships' logbooks.

Here is, for instance, a report of Baron de Bie, the Netherlands ambassador.

"On the 13th day of this month there was seen

here a majestic meteor. Vice-Admiral K. I. Kruise gave orders to observe it in detail, and to prepare a written account, a copy of which I am here attaching:

"April 2 (13), 1716, on the second day of Easter, about nine o'clock in the evening, there appeared in the clear and cloudless sky a rather brilliant meteor, whose gradual development was as follows:

First, rather a dense cloud, pointed to its top and wide at its base, climbed up from the horizon in the ENE part of the sky. The cloud ascended so fast that in less than three minutes it reached a point halfway between the horizon and the zenith.

At the very moment of its appearance there manifested in the WNW direction an enormous shining comet that ascended up to about 12 degrees above the horizon, after which another dark cloud rose from the north, swiftly climbing and approaching the first one that moved forward somewhat more slowly. There formed between these two clouds, from the north-eastern side, a bright light in the shape of a column that for a few minutes did not change its position, whereas the cloud that had appeared in the west was moving across it with an extraordinary speed and ran into the other cloud with such terrible force that a vast area in the sky was enveloped by fire that arose due to their collision, being accompanied with smoke, and the brilliance of the light spread from the ENE to the very west. This smoke rose up to about 20 degrees above the horizon, and the fiery beams were traversing it incessantly in all directions—just as if it were a battle of many armies and fleets. This phenomenon lasted for a quarter of an hour continuously, in its full brilliance, after which it began to gradually fade and ended with the appearance of a multitude of bright arrows reaching an [angular] altitude of 80 degrees over the horizon. The cloud that had appeared in the east had dispersed, and afterward the other one vanished as well; thus, by 10 o'clock the sky became clear again and shone with bright stars. One cannot imagine, to what extent this phenomenon was horrible at the moment when the two clouds ran into each other, when both of them seemed to have shattered due to the violent impact, and when they were also accompanied by a host of small clouds moving westward with extraordinary speed. The fire that gushed out from them was like thunderbolts—extraordinary bright and utterly dazzling." [28]

Witness reports were summarized not only by Baron de Bie, but also by the Russian Commander, subsequently Vice-Admiral, N. A. Senyavin:

"The year 1716. April 2. Revel. On the second day of Easter, by the evening, about 9 o'clock, when it was still light but stars had already appeared, one could see the following:

1. In the east-north-east, somewhat closer to the east, there arrived from the horizon a cloud very black, pointed above and wide below, which moved upward speedily—so that in less than three minutes its angle of elevation reached the half of a right angle.

2. As the black cloud appeared, there also appeared in the WNW something like a great light broom and it ascended over the horizon to an elevation about 12 degrees; at that time another black cloud appeared out of the broom, closer to the north, which very quickly moved against the first one to the east; and the first cloud moved against the second one to NW, and between these clouds there appeared a light in the form of a column which stood still about ten minutes; afterwards the cloud that arrived from the NW went terribly quickly through the column and hit the other cloud that was moving from the east and [they] mingled with the great fire and smoke that was seen from the ENE to the west, and the smoke was seen above the horizon up to 20 degrees, and through the smoke one could see an incessant fire, like a fleet and an army were fighting, and all this was seen for 15 minutes; then there appeared [in the sky] what looked like many fiery brooms and those ascended, reaching an elevation of 80 degrees. And the cloud that [came] from the east moved to the south and became invisible first, and that coming from the NW became invisible about 10 o'clock, after which the stars returned to the sky.

One cannot describe the fear felt when these clouds ran into each other at a great speed; also, many small clouds followed the bigger one that was moving from the north, and the fire was so bright, like lightning, that the eyes could not withstand it." [29, p. 111-112]

In the opinion of the Russian ufologist I. V. Bogatyriov, there is no escape from the conclusion that the above-described event was indeed anomalous, and that it has much to do with the modern UFO phenomenon (see Ref. 30).

3.2 Other Phenomena of the 18th Century

On July 23, 1739 (Old Style), when the Russian brigantine "Archangel Michael", under the command of Captain M. P. Spannberg, was sailing from Japan to the Kamchatka Peninsula, there was put in the logbook the following entry: "...At half past eleven [at night] we saw in the ENE direction a star that seemed to be falling, and it was for two or three *sazhens* [four to six meters,—*M. G.*] flying around and emitting a beam of light that illuminated our ship and its sails, and it became very light." (Quoted from: [31].)

Some reports from the naturalistic period have no analogs in the archives of modern ufology, but they correlate well with some similar accounts from other countries dating from the same period. The nature of the events described in these reports remains until now rather vague.

Thus, in an old diary, written by a clergyman (whose name is, unfortunately, unknown, since the title page of the diary has been lost) some very strange records were found. It was Professor M. I. Sokolov who discovered the diary and published excerpts from it.

"Some vessels were moving along the Volga river, and where it was, I am not aware, and there flew [in the air] a great serpent and was carrying in its mouth a man across the Volga, in all his clothes, with his *katas* [a sort of shoes] on, his *katas* being trimmed with red broadcloth. And one could hear how that poor man was uttering: "Ikh, ikh". And [the serpent] traversed the Volga and fell with the man into a swamp. And the serpent's appearance was like a fire at night; and people who had seen this specter started telling this story in nearby settlements, and they were told that at a such-and-such village a man disappeared in the evening from a playground.

There is some waste ground named Kashiryaziva, at a small village Uvarovo of the Kolomensky district, at a boundary near Rezov. One autumn came we for a night-watch over horses at grass to Grezvishche, being more than 20 people, maybe 30; were there also some virtuous girls as well; and in accordance with the habits of young people each played what he or she wished... And two hours of continuous play passed, and suddenly there became illuminated [the space of] about a quarter of a *poprishche* [about 300 meters,—*M. G.*], and the horses that were at this place broke into a fast run. As for us, I myself looked upward and all of us, me included, saw a fiery serpent enveloped by white fire and which wriggled directly above our camp, at an altitude of about two or three belfries, being of three *arshins* [some two meters] and much more in length, but impossible it was to determine from the ground, because it was high up. And was it standing still over us for a quarter of an hour and all of us were then praying to Jesus. And it was standing with its head directed to the left, that is to the east, and vanished in such a way." [32, p. 493–494]

In an issue of the magazine *Biblioteka dlya Chteniya* (Library For Reading) dated 1861 was published a story related by Ural Cossacks who had been eyewitnesses of a strange incident:

"Late in the summer of the year 1858 in the Kirghiz Bukey horde there happened a miracle... In the steppe, not far from the *Khan* Headquarters, in broad daylight, an enormous serpent fell down to the ground, being like the biggest camel thick and some twenty *sazhens* [40 meters] long. For about a minute the serpent was lying motionless, after which, coiling up in a ring, it lifted its head up to about two *sazhens* [four meters] over the ground and hissed strongly and shrilly, like a tempest. People, cattle, and all flesh kissed the ground in fear. [We] thought the Doomsday had come. Suddenly, from the sky as well, there descended a cloud, approached the serpent and stopped above it. The serpent jumped up to the cloud, the cloud enveloped the serpent, whirled, and went out in the sky. After the serpent there only remained on the ground fumes and a stench. But a few minutes later a fresh breeze came from the east and the air became clear. Everything returned to its former normal state." [33]

For some parallels to these cases in American "ufological prehistory", see Refs. 34–36.

During the whole naturalistic period (that is, up until the year 1892) there was never made in the Russian Empire even a single observation of a "technogeneous" UFO—that is, a strange object that could have been described as a "machine" (at least, the present author has not come across such reports as yet). Here is, perhaps, the most typical "UFO observation" of that time (recorded by the historian A. Leopoldov, who lived in the 19th century):

"...During the summer of 1836 in the Saratov province there were seen plenty of wandering lights and meteors. The most remarkable of the latter was seen on July 8, at 10 p.m.: almost on the horizon, to the north, there appeared a globe-shaped, whitish mass as large as the moon; for several minutes it hovered in the air, after which disappeared, slowly descending to the ground; it was only its trail that continued to wriggle for a few minutes more as a zigzagging stream." [37]

(To be continued)

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DID A UFO CRASH AT AURORA, TEXAS?

Sir, —

In *RIAP Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 7-8, Dr. Yuriy Morozov wrote in his interesting paper "The "Russian Roswell": a Legend Under Examination":

"Any connection between the legend under consideration and the newspaper story about the Aurora, Texas, "UFO crash" that was supposed to have happened on April 17, 1897 is also out of question. True, apart from the chronological proximity of these incidents, the latter story bears a resemblance to the Russian one at least in the following three essential motifs: a) it was an unknown aircraft that crashed; b) the dead pilot was buried in a local cemetery; c) fragments of the aircraft, made from a strange silvery metal, were gathered up by the local people as souvenirs. The newspaper report about the Aurora incident was subsequently exposed as a hoax."

In the Editorial published in the same *RB* issue it was also stated that "...typologically this story [that is, the "Russian Roswell",—C. A.] resembles more the "Aurora incident" than the Roswell one, but the former is, as competent ufologists are certain, an established hoax..."

To my mind, the opinion that the "Aurora incident" was *definitely* a hoax is a little too hasty, although not devoid of reason. Here I would like to reconsider the story in some detail, hoping it would be of interest to *RB* readers in general and Dr. Yuriy Morozov in particular. A newspaper report from 1897 claimed that a spacecraft and its other-worldly pilot had crashed in Aurora, Texas, a peaceful hamlet just 45 miles north of Dallas. The story would be ignored for 70 years but did eventually become one of the most debated topics in ufology.

The original article, published in the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Dallas Times Herald* and in the *Fort Worth Register*, ran as follows:

"Aurora, Wise Co., Tex., April 17.—(To the News)—About 6 o'clock this morning, the early risers of Aurora were astonished at the sudden appearance of the airship which has been seen sailing through the country. It was travelling due north, and much nearer the earth than ever before. Evidently some of the machinery was out of order, for it was making a speed of only ten or twelve miles an hour and gradually settling toward the earth. It sailed directly over the public

square, and when it reached the north part of town collided with the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and went to pieces with a terrific explosion, scattering debris over several acres of ground, wrecking the windmill and water tank, and destroying the judge's flower garden.

"The pilot of the ship is supposed to have been the only one on board, and while his remains are badly disfigured, enough of the original has been picked up to show that he was not an inhabitant of this world. Mr T. J. Weems, the United States signals service officer at this place and an authority on astronomy, gives it as his opinion that he was a native of Mars. Papers found on his person—evidently the records of his travels—are written in some unknown hieroglyphics, and cannot be deciphered.

"The ship was too badly wrecked to form any conclusions as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminium and silver, and it must have weighed several tons. The town is full of people to-day who are viewing the wreck and gathering pieces of the strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon to-morrow. S. E. HAYDON."[1]

The three newspapers in which the story was published described the event with the same details, except the *Fort Worth Register*, which did not mention the hieroglyphics.

As exciting as the prospect of finding an extraterrestrial spacecraft should have been there is no evidence to show that the dispatch was taken seriously by anybody at the time. There was no contemporary follow-up of the event and no academic body offered to carry out an autopsy of the corpse or an analysis of the debris. No sketches were made and no photographs were taken of what would surely have been an astounding event and a revolutionary moment in science.

It took over seventy years for anybody to take a serious look at the story. During an important UFO flap in the United States, journalist Frank Tolbert decided to make some inquiries for himself to see whether there was any truth to S. E. Haydon's article. Tolbert, himself a writer for the *Daily Morning News*, had long been interested in the wave of airship sightings that had swept America in the 1890s and he realized that the spectacular nature of the Aurora crash would make it the easiest of the cases to substantiate, if it were true.

Upon interviewing the retired men and women who had been living in Aurora since the end of the nineteenth century, however, he was told that the whole episode had been a hoax perpetrated by radio operators and was merely a piece of entertainment, no different from any of the other spoofs published at the time. When his conclusions were published in *Flying Saucer Review* in 1973 in an article entitled "Aurora Spaceman—RIP?" it seemed to most ufologists that there was little more to say on the matter.[2] In fact, as early as 1966 Dr. J. Allen Hynek had sent a researcher to the site to probe a little further and learned that there had never been a windmill on Proctor's farm and that T. J. Weems, said to have been a signals officer in the article, had actually been a blacksmith. He was also informed that S. E. Haydon (or 'E. E. Haydon'), a local cotton-buyer and a writer, had probably invented the tale to attract tourism to the little town. This information came from a Mr. Oscar Lowry of Newark, who told the investigator that he had been eleven years old at the time and that "no less than twenty others" had stopped by to ask questions since then.[3]

This would have been the end of the line for 'the Aurora incident' if separate investigations had not shed entirely different light on the affair. William Case, aviation writer for the *Dallas Times Herald*, was alerted to the story by Hayden Hewes of the International UFO Bureau in the spring of 1973. Another journalist, Jim Marrs, then an aerospace/aviation writer at the *Fort Worth Star–Telegram*, also became interested and soon both men were actively involved in the search for the ultimate answer. Case had spoken to some of the oldest residents in Aurora and was convinced that something had indeed crashed on Proctor's farm. He had learnt that there were only four people in Aurora old enough to have any recollection of the events, and three of them supported the reality of the story.

One of these was Etta Oates. Brawley and Etta Oates purchased Judge Proctor's farm in 1945 and lived there for many years. Although Brawley died just before interest in the incident was renewed, Mrs Oates was able to tell the researchers that she "had heard the story for years." "Nothing grew for years in that one spot in the field where that spaceship is supposed to have hit," she added. As Jim Marrs points out in his 1997 book *Alien Agenda*[4], the Oates family had been plagued by serious medical problems throughout the time they lived on the property, including cysts and goiters (a swelling of the thyroid gland in the neck). This was blamed on the water they took from the well. "I've been told it's radioactive," Mrs Oates told Marrs.

Charlie C. Stephens was another old-timer who recalled the events with a clear mind, despite being 83 years old at the time of the interview. Although at first he "didn't want to get involved," Marrs was eventually able to coax him into giving his version of the story.

Stephens explained that he had been less than ten years old when he and his father, out in the pasture with some cattle, saw an illuminated cigar-shaped object pass overhead in the direction

of Aurora. They heard an explosion and the sky seemed to light up with fire for several minutes. The boy wanted to rush off to town to see what was going on but his father "said we had to finish our chores." The next day, the elder Mr. Stephens paid a visit to the town, where he saw a "mass of torn metal and burned rubble." He did not mention to his family seeing a dead pilot, which is logical enough if the being had been buried on the day of the crash. "During the years I was growing up he told me the story many times," said Charlie Stephens during his interview.

G. C. Curley, a 98-year-old man then residing in a nursing home in Lewisville, told the researchers that two of his friends had galloped off to Aurora to see the wreck of the spaceship.

"They told me the airship had been seen coming from the direction of Dallas the day before and had been sighted in the area. But no one knew what it was. They said it hit something near Judge Proctor's well. The airship was destroyed and the pilot in it was badly torn up. My friends said there was a big crowd of sightseers who were picking up pieces of the exploded airship. But no one could identify the metal it was made of. We didn't have metal like that in America at that time. And they said it was difficult to describe the pilot. They saw only a torn up body. They didn't say people were frightened by the crash. They just couldn't understand what it was."[5]

The only other witness found by Case and Marrs was a ninety-one-year-old woman called Mary Evans. She told the researchers:

"I was only fifteen at the time and had all but forgotten the incident until it appeared in the papers recently. We were living in Aurora at the time, but my mother and father wouldn't let me go with them when they went up to the crash site at Judge Proctor's well. When they returned home they told me how the airship had exploded. The pilot was torn up and killed in the crash. The men of the town who gathered his remain said he was a 'small man' and buried him that same day in Aurora cemetery. That crash certainly caused a lot of excitement. Many people were frightened. They didn't know what to expect. That was years before we had any regular airplanes or other kinds of airships."[6]

Did some anomalous vehicle crash on a farm in Aurora in April 1897 or not? Strictly speaking, the 'Aurora crash' cannot be considered an outright hoax based on the information we currently possess. Sceptics cite Wise County historian Etta Pegues, who was sure that Haydon's article was "a beautiful piece of fiction."[7] "I have talked to people who were alive then," she said. "They all said Judge Proctor had no windmill."[8]

There are three problems with this statement. Firstly, it is not true that none of the older generation believed in the Aurora crash, as revealed by the witness testimonies reproduced above. Secondly, far too much has been read into the reference to 'Proctor's windmill.' None of the witness testimonies refer to a windmill in their descriptions of the crash, only to the old well. Haydon may have been misinformed about this point, just as he could have got the name of the military officer wrong. The third point to bear in mind is that Etta Pegues' main source of information was Robbie Reynolds Hanson, who told her that the story was a hoax. Hanson had been twelve years old in 1897 and was living outside Aurora with her parents. Apparently neither she nor her family knew anything about the crash until a man came by on his horse a few days later and told them about it.[9] This does not seem to be a particularly strong case against the reality of the event.

There are two reasons why the Aurora incident has been dismissed by modern researchers. The first is that the whole case has become something of a circus, full of claims and counter-claims that have generally led nowhere. An effort to locate the "small man's" grave only succeeded in angering the locals. Foreseeing the intentions of Case and Marrs a band of Aurora residents kept a tight control on access to the cemetery, just in case anyone started digging up coffins without authorization, and threatened to seek restraining orders against trespassers. The city marshal, the sheriff and two deputies patrolled the site for two weeks while two UFO organizations competed to be the first to exhume the body. Meanwhile Case believed he had traced the pilot's resting place, a small grave marked only by broken headstone. The only thing carved into it was a '<' shape containing three small circles and when Case passed his metal detector over the grave it detected at least three large pieces of metal buried underneath. Unfortunately, the headstone fragment disappeared the night after the marshal called off the patrols and the mysterious metal was stolen not long after this.[10]

A similar state of affairs surrounded the search for metal pieces at Judge Proctor's farm. The first serious attempt was in 1967 when Alfred Kraus of West Texas State University brought in a metal detector. However the only metallic items he found were old stove lids and other domestic litter. Then, in 1973, Case reported that Brawley Oates had come across some silvery pieces of metal while cleaning out the well. A laboratory analysis carried out by physicist Dr Tom Gray of the North Texas State University revealed the metal to be aluminium alloy, a material used in the 1920s to make kitchen utensils.

In 1974 Bill Case tried to arrange for a subsurface radar scan of the grave but died before this could be carried out. Since then no further developments in the case have come about and

the entire issue is treated with utmost skepticism. Not surprisingly the Aurora incident has been described by a writer for *Fortean Times* as "Roswell's stillborn twin."[11]

The second reason to doubt the authenticity of the Aurora incident is the historical context in which it emerged. It must be borne in mind that UFO crashes were a popular newspaper-selling gimmick in the final years of the nineteenth century. For example, a hoax was performed on December 3rd, 1896 when dairy farmers in San Francisco dashed to a cow pasture, alerted by a loud bang and cries for help. There they found two dazed men staggering next to an immense cone-shaped tube of galvanized iron with broken wings. It was not immediately apparent that the 'pilot,' Mr. J. D. de Gear, had staged the whole thing by dragging the 'airship' to the top of a hill and pushing it over. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the owner of a nearby tavern enjoyed the resulting increase in customers during the ensuing fuss.[12]

Another airship was said to have crashed in a farm in Missouri on April 4th[13] and a similar object was reported to have dropped into a reservoir near Rhodes, Iowa the following week.[14] Days later it was reported that a third had crashed at Waterloo, Iowa,[15] and a fourth supposedly plummeted into Sycamore Creek in the same month.[16] The Aurora incident of April 17th, seen in this context, could be regarded as a somewhat predictable version of the same story.

The nonsense became more fantastic as journalists competed with each other to publish the most bizarre stories. In a letter to the *Houston Post* dated May 2nd, 1897 a gentleman named John Leander wrote that one "Mr. Oleson," an elderly Texan sailor of his acquaintance, claimed to have been shipwrecked on a tiny island in the Indian Ocean in 1862. Not long after this he and his comrades witnessed a spectacular event: a huge airship with enormous wings crashed into a rock cliff on the island. Inside the wreckage of the vessel they found the bodies of the crew. Twelve feet tall with tanned skin, these creatures were obviously not from this world. "Their hair and beard were also long," Oleson had said, "and as soft and silky as the hair of an infant."

The stranded sailors took refuge in the downed craft until they finally "summoned courage to drag the gigantic bodies to the cliff and tumble them over." As proof of his adventure Oleson took a ring from the finger of one of the giants. It was two and a quarter inches in diameter and "made of a compound of metals unknown to any jeweller," set with "two reddish stones." Finally they managed to build a raft and were rescued by a passing Russian ship.

This tale, though doubtless a piece of fiction, is interesting because it resembles an ancient Egyptian story called *The Tale of the Shipwreck*. In this 4,000-year-old story the survivor of a shipwreck finds himself on an uncharted island ruled by a giant serpent-man. This creature was the last surviving member of a family who had lost their lives in a fire caused by a 'star' that had fallen from the sky. Though the story of Oleson might differ structurally, the same basic elements (a mysterious island, deceased otherworldly giants and an extraterrestrial object that falls disastrously from the sky) are recurrent images in ufological narratives.

Anyway however, I think it is sufficiently safe to say that based on the existing evidence, the question whether the "Aurora incident" was a hoax still remains open and definitely needing a further—and deeper—examination.

— Chris Aubeck, Madrid, Spain

Notes and References

[1] *Dallas Morning News* (Texas), April 19th, 1897.

[2] Buckle E. Aurora Spaceman—RIP?—*Flying Saucer Review*, 1973, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 7–9. An article by Donald B. Hanlon and Jacques Vallee, "Airships Over Texas," had already been published in the January 1967 edition of *FSR* (pp. 20–27) revealing important problems with the case.

[3] Letter from William F. Driskell, Field Representative of The Associated General Contractors of America, Inc. (Texas branch), to Dr. J. Allen Hynek, October 7th 1966.

[4] Jim Marrs' investigations are detailed in the introduction to his book. See: Marrs J. *Alien Agenda*, New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1998, pp. xxvi–xxxvi.

[5] Buckle E. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

[6] Marrs J. *Op. cit.*, p. xxxii.

[7] Gorvetzian J. Once Upon a Time in Aurora.—*Fortean Times*, 1998, No. 115.

[8] Marrs J. *Op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

[10] A couple of years ago an article was published on the Internet claiming that the headstone had been found, just a few meters away from the grave. So far, however, no further details have been released, though the photographs are convincing.

[11] Gorvetzian J. *Op. cit.* An interesting skeptical discussion of the case can be found in *The UFOs that Never Were* by Jenny Randles, Andy Roberts and David Clarke (London: London House, pp. 25–30). Unfortunately the book does not resolve the issue of the eyewitness testimonies that Jim Marrs had published in his book *Alien Agenda* three years before.

[12] *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 4th, 1896.

[13] *St. Joseph Daily Herald*, April 6th, 1897.

[14] *Iowa State Register*, April 13th, 1897.

[15] *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, April 16th, 1897.

[16] *Nashville Banner*, April 17th, 1897.

RB QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: Dr. Jacques Vallee

From the Editor: Dr. Jacques Vallee does not need any special introduction to our readers. He is one of very few "ufological classics" (even though his own ideas about the nature of the UFO phenomenon are rather non-classical!) — a world-renowned expert on the UFO problem, and author of several books that are in no danger of the non-cumulativeness that is so typical for our field of research.

One can also recall that the article "What is flying over the Earth?", by Jacques Vallee and Alexander Kazantsev, published in *Trud* newspaper in August of 1967 was one of the first ufological publications in the Soviet press, of which *22 million* copies were sold. We are glad to welcome Dr. Jacques Vallee to the pages of our bulletin!

1. Dr. Vallee, what is, in your opinion, contemporary anomalistics? What are its main tasks?

It is a standard observation that there would be no science without anomalies. The problem is that the structure of "big science" does not encourage looking for things that do not fit. Most of the funding of modern institutions goes to incremental knowledge, not to the exploration of exceptional phenomena. Look at the long time it has taken for the medical community to react to new disease patterns like HIV; or how long it took (20 years!) for Chandrasekhar's observations of white dwarfs to be accepted by astronomers. And this was happening in well-recognized disciplines! Contemporary anomalistics has to start with rigorous observations and measurement. It has to be inter-disciplinary and it has to carefully sift rumor from fact.

2. Is the UFO problem scientific, in your opinion?

French astronomer Danjon once said that no problem was scientific by nature, only by the way it was approached. In that sense the UFO problem is complex because it has a physical level, a physiological and psychological level, and a social level. These three levels need to be addressed with different methodologies, yet they cannot be completely separated from each other.

3. What, in your opinion, could be considered as the solution of the UFO problem? What is needed to be done (both on theoretical and organizational levels) to reach such a solution?

We are a long way from a "solution" to this problem. I have advocated starting a series of small research projects rather than one big centralized one. In that sense I think the French GEPAN/SEPRA uses the wrong model by trying to concentrate all the data and have a single methodology, just as Project Blue Book and the Condon study had the wrong model. Modern science makes progress when several teams work in parallel, or even in competition with each other on complex problems.

4. What are the main achievements of the last 50 years of ufology? What are the main shortcomings of present-day ufological studies?

The major problem today is that the field has become saturated with false rumors and misinformation. This has driven scientists away and much of the interesting research simply is not published any more. Personally I feel that anything I would say as a scientist today on this subject would simply get lost in the noise. And if you try to raise serious issues that challenge the quasi-religious belief systems current in the field your life becomes impossible. As a result there is much information that interested researchers should know about, that does not get communicated.

5. What is the real role of "big science" in UFO studies? What are the prospects of its participation in these studies?

The phenomenon is so rich in physical observations that a lot of basic techniques can be applied to the data without pre-judging the answer. For example, if you find a metallic sample after a close encounter, you don't need to speculate whether the phenomenon is a craft, or whether it is extraterrestrial, or a hoax. The first task is to do a classical analysis and see where that leads. Similarly, if you have luminosity data you can infer energy levels by using classic formulae. The problem is that everybody (skeptics and believers alike) wants to jump to an answer before doing the hard work of analysis.

6. What is the role and what are the prospects of participation of anomalistics in the development of the UFO problem?

Anomalistics can help us place the UFO phenomenon into a larger context. For instance, we would benefit from learning more about current studies of anomalous phenomena in the atmosphere: ball lightning, sprites, elves and the like; similarly psychic phenomena point to relationships between consciousness and physical reality that are directly relevant to the study of UFO experiencers; and there are cosmological and physical anomalies that point to the existence of higher dimensions, possibly to parallel universes.

7. Could you formulate the main conclusions about the nature of the UFO phenomenon that resulted from your long-standing work in this field?

We are dealing with a very robust physical phenomenon that challenges our notions of time and space and our ideas about human history. While it is "real" in a physical sense and manifests through material objects that can be photographed, tracked on radar, and interact with the terrestrial environment, it also makes a powerful impact on the consciousness of observers. This calls not only for more rigorous documentation of reported events but for completely novel methodology.

MYSTERIOUS RESCUE IN THE STEPPE

Yuriy M. Agarkov, Nizhniy Tagil, Russia

I would like to describe here a strange event that happened to me in December of 1948. I was then 26 years old, living and working in the settlement of Burma (Karaganda Region of Kazakhstan). This event has remained in my memory for all my life. Here I will try to depict it in every detail.

One winter day, after dinner, I came to the stock-breeding branch of our state farm named "Maria" situated at about nine kilometers from Burma (please see the map on page 15).

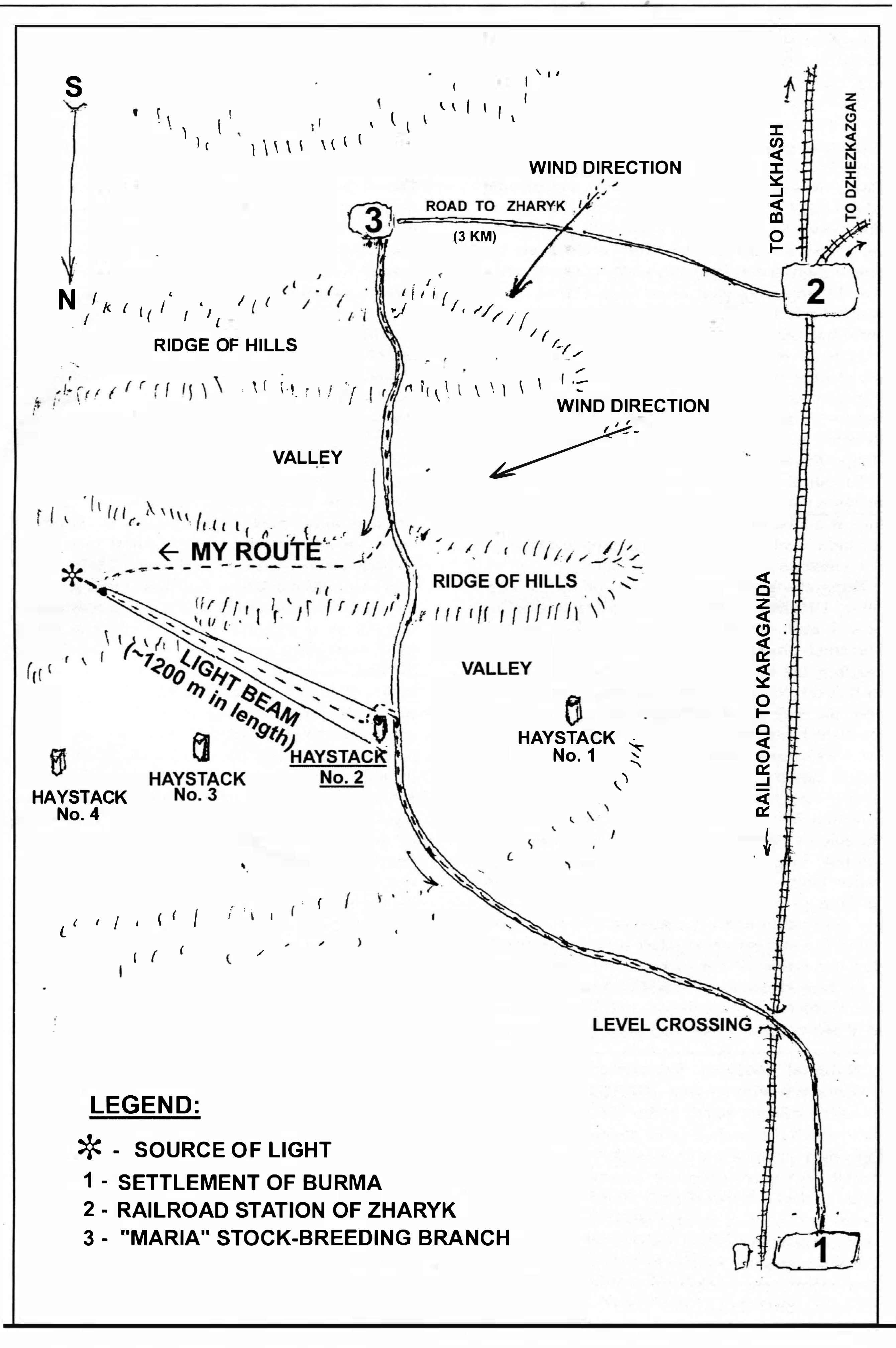
At 3 a.m., or so, I prepared to come back to Burma, since it was obligatory for me to be there by 6 a.m. When I went out to the street, there was a veritable blizzard. It was pitch-dark, the strong wind could knock a man down. The air was filled with dense powdery snow; it was difficult even to breathe. I stood still for a little while, being in grave doubt: should I go, or not? But I was bound indeed to be at Burma by 6 o'clock; therefore, taking a look round, I finally decided to go. After all, there was only one road to Burma—one well flattened by horse hooves and cart wheels. I thought I would feel its surface all the time under my feet; if I happened to leave it, I would immediately get into soft snow. Besides, I decided to orient myself by the wind direction: it blew from behind to my left side. The locality was well known to me: in summer, working as a tractor-driver, I operated a hay baler. Taking all this into consideration, I decided to go, even though being somewhat alarmed, and set out.

Now the main thing for me was not letting the road out from under my feet. At a distance of about 300–400 meters from "Maria" there was a first range of hills, perpendicular to my route. I safely crossed this ridge, feeling the upward and downward slopes. Then I must have traversed a valley about one kilometer wide, and climbed a second ridge of hills, also perpendicular to my route. After that, I must have descended to a second valley, where I had baled the hay in the summer. Having crossed it and climbed a little, I would have reached the railroad from Balkhash to Karaganda. Moving along the railroad, I would then have come to the Burma settlement. Such must have been my route.

However, when climbing the second ridge of hills, I lost my way. This happened because the wind had blown the snow off from the southern slope of the hills. I came down from the road onto the hard frozen ground without even noticing it. Nothing could be seen around; complete darkness and the howling of the wind reigned in the steppe. Probably, the wind direction did also change a little and it was now blowing along the valley. While still going forward, I felt that something was wrong: there lacked a descent from the hills (however gently sloping it had to be). Besides, I became anxious about the smoothness of the road: it seemed as if I was walking strictly in the right direction, never deviating to the right or to the left. A few minutes before, I was always getting into the snow either to the right or to the left, and suddenly everything had changed!

I stopped. What was really happening?! Tried to come down from the illusory road in one direction—no wayside at all, in another one—just the same again. I rushed hither and yon: no effect, there was in fact not a vestige of the road, my main guide! Just at that moment I understood that I had left the road—where and when, I did not know then (this became clear only three days later). Having taken a few steps further, I felt deeper snow under my feet, like the windward slope of a hill. *Where should I go?!* I stopped once again, trying to estimate the wind direction. After all, it was another guide that I was using in my trek, together with the road surface. But the wind now appeared to attack me from every possible direction, blowing violently as if rejoicing that I was absolutely in its power. Only then did I realize the full horror of the situation I was in. Just imagine what it means—to go astray at night, during a snow-storm in Kazakhstan, where for tens of kilometers around there can be no traces of human dwelling. I had myself witnessed tragic events when people froze to death only a hundred meters from our settlement, being caught by a snow-storm in broad daylight. And I exclaimed in terror: "My God, I'm lost!" (I ought to say I am not a religious believer: "My God"—my mother used to express herself in such a way.)

At the very moment when this thought horrified me, a powerful beam of light shone out from behind my back. This was as if a searchlight was suddenly turned on, or as if an automobile silently approached me from the rear and switched on its head lamps. I winced with surprise. My first reaction was just to jump aside, but before I did so, the beam went out. This was a sort of a momentary flash. Nonetheless, I had time to see, right ahead, in the valley, at a distance of about a kilometer or a little further, a stack of baled hay. There must have been six haystacks—I knew that since I had baled them myself. The stack that I noticed differed from


S
N
WIND DIRECTION
ROAD TO ZHARYK
(3 KM)
3
2
TO BALKHASH
TO DZHEZKAZGAN
RIDGE OF HILLS
WIND DIRECTION
VALLEY
← MY ROUTE
RIDGE OF HILLS
LIGHT BEAM
(~1200 m in length)
VALLEY
HAYSTACK
No. 1
HAYSTACK
No. 2
HAYSTACK
No. 3
HAYSTACK
No. 4
RAILROAD TO KARAGANDA
LEVEL CROSSING
1
LEGEND:
* - SOURCE OF LIGHT
1 - SETTLEMENT OF BURMA
2 - RAILROAD STATION OF ZHARYK
3 - "MARIA" STOCK-BREEDING BRANCH

other ones: it remained incomplete due to the lack of a few bales. This stack alone was located near the road along which I should have walked. From me to the stack there passed for a moment over the snow-covered steppe a path of light. The stack completely fitted in the round light spot. The light tunnel, through which I saw the stack, was practically free from the driving snow—only solitary snow-flakes flew across it, not preventing me from distinctly seeing the stack and a snow-drift in front of it. Even the opening on one side of the stack, where the hay was lacking, was well discernible. (When afterwards I returned to the place at day-time, I made sure that the stack did in fact look just so.)

In front of me there stretched on the snow my shadow some four or five meters long. I saw it quite clearly. The beam of light was about two meters wide right before me, widening with distance. It, as it were, lay on the snow-covered steppe for a very short while.

To put it briefly, there was an indelible impression that a real flash of light did occur behind me, at a distance of eight to ten meters. When the light went out, there came complete darkness; it seemed as if I had lost my sight.

Being absolutely unable to feel or realize anything, I rushed forward to the place where just now I saw the haystack that could save me. Stupefied, I moved mechanically but swiftly, sinking into the snow knee-deep. Hurry up, hurry, in that direction! No reference-points were there, only the invisible straight line seemingly left by the light beam. Now I am recalling the situation even with some interest, but then... I almost ran seeing nothing around me and fearing that I would forget the direction to the haystack of salvation. When I reach it I'll be safe—that was the sole thought remaining in my mind. I cannot say how long I was traversing the snow-covered valley. Only when I almost fell into the snow-drift in front of the haystack did I understand that my destination had been reached. Here even the wind did not scour my face too seriously; its howling remained somewhere at a distance.

I got my breath more or less back and reasoning ability returned to me. Before that I had behaved as if hypnotized by the happening. "Well, now I am safe, now everything depends on me!" Such were my thoughts, together with a firm conviction that the worst was over. By touch I determined that several bales of hay were in fact lacking at one corner of the stack and therefore it was the haystack situated near the road. The latter ran parallel to the stack at about 20 meters from it. Then I began to measure off, step by step, the distance from the stack. Soon I found myself on the hard surface of the road. There I determined the wind direction (it still had to blow from behind to my left side) and, some time later, I safely reached the settlement of Burma.

Three days later, I went again to "Maria". The weather was marvellous: complete silence, the bright sun, and the sparkling snow covering the steppe. Having reached the haystack from which I had returned to the road, I decided to scrutinize the scene of my night adventure by daylight. Everything looked as I remembered. The straight line of my footprints going to the ridge of hills was well discernible; the footprints were a little whiter, the snow around them a little greyer. The dent in the snow-drift in front of the haystack left by my body when I had almost fallen into it, even when powdered with fresh snow, could also easily be made out. But what impressed me most was the line of my footprints: it was *ideally straight*, as if drawn with a ruler! Later on, I tried more than once, selecting an object at a distance, to reach it with closed eyes. But every time I deviated to the left, describing an arc—which was quite natural, after all.

Another enigma that still astonishes me is the nature of the light beam. How could it pierce through more than a kilometer of the heavy snow-storm? This is simply impossible even for a powerful searchlight! If this were just the work of some mechanism in my brain subjectively perceived as a light phenomenon (let's suppose that for a moment), how could I see my shadow on the snow-covered ground? No, it was a real physical beam of light, even if a very strange one. Its source was probably situated at a few meters behind me at a height of a few meters as well.

For many years I never said a word about this very strange event. First, it seems to be absolutely incredible and defying any rational explanation. And second, it was somewhat "too personal", so to speak—since, enigmatic or not, this phenomenon saved me from inevitable death. But the question remains and still worries me: what was it?

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